

and refused to comply with tough sanctions on Russia. That is what the advocates of CAATSA argued. This is a mechanism to force an administration to obey U.S. law and stand up to Russia.

Now, at the time, the Democrats believed they were speaking about the Trump administration, but the principles behind CAATSA apply equally to Joe Biden's defying the law and giving this gift to Vladimir Putin at the expense of U.S. national security interests.

This administration has had a path for months to clear these nominees. It has declined to exercise that path. That path remains before it, nonetheless, because this nominee and the next one are directly relevant to cleaning up the mess that the Biden administration has made in Afghanistan.

I do not object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Donald Lu, of California, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Lu nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all without any intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I clearly do not share the views of my colleague from Texas, but for the sake of the Senate's work, I will reserve responding to it for another time.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 150, Brett M. Holmgren, to be an Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, and that the Senate vote on the nomination without any intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, reserving the right to object for the same reasons I just articulated—that this position, as with the previous one, is

directly related to trying to clean up the mess, the disaster that the Biden administration has created in Afghanistan.

I intend not to object to this nomination.

The remaining holds remain in place, and the administration can lift the Treasury hold and the career state holds anytime they want by following the law under CAATSA and either imposing sanctions or, if they don't want to impose sanctions on Russia, triggering a vote in Congress so that this body can decide whether or not sanctions could be imposed on Russia. The administration has had that option in front of it for many weeks. It still has that option.

I do not object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any further objections?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Brett M. Holmgren, of Minnesota, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (Intelligence and Research)?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all without any intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 322, Brian A. Nichols, to be an Assistant Secretary of State for the Western Hemisphere, and that the Senate vote on the nomination without intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I lifted my hold on this nominee a number of weeks ago, and for that reason, I do not object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Brian A. Nichols, of Rhode Island, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Career Minister, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (Western Hemisphere Affairs).

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Nichols nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, all without any intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to the nomination; that any statements related to the nomination be printed in the RECORD; and that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from New Jersey.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 323, Marcela Escobari, to be Assistant Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development, and that the Senate vote on the nomination without any intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Madam President, reserving the right to be object, as I described minutes ago, the Biden administration is in outright defiance of Federal law. An overwhelming bipartisan majority of the Senate and the House have passed tough sanctions on Russia—sanctions that work; sanctions that shut down the Nord Stream 2 pipeline for a year. But when President Biden came into office, he chose to override Federal law and instead to give a multibillion-dollar gift to Vladimir Putin in Russia. That decision is a generational geopolitical mistake. It harms U.S. national security interests, it benefits Russia, and it hurts Europe.

Moreover, my hold on these nominations, I have expressed to the administration in writing and orally over a month ago. They have a path to lifting the hold on the Treasury Department nominees and the career State Department nominees simply by either enforcing sanctions under CAATSA on Russia or overriding those sanctions and triggering a vote in this body where Members of this body can register our views on whether Joe Biden is correct in giving this multibillion-dollar gift to Vladimir Putin that undermines our national security.

Accordingly, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam President, it is unfortunate that this last nominee is objected to. This particular position—we are talking about Haiti. We are talking about having an Assistant Administrator that can help us restore the tragic situation in Haiti to a place in which people can live and won't seek migration to the United States.

When we are talking about what is happening in the Western Hemisphere, in Venezuela, where there is a huge humanitarian set of refugees leaving; when we talk about what is happening

in Cuba with reference to the movements for democracy, this particular position would be dealing with all of that.

I must say, I know that my colleague wants to say none of this would have changed anything. That is not the case. I am not saying that the ultimate result in Afghanistan would have changed, but certainly, when we do not have people in key positions advocating for U.S. national security and policy, it exacerbates the set of circumstances because we don't have the wherewithal to do what is necessary. There are many other key positions I will be coming to the Senate floor and highlighting how that has a risk to national security.

Finally, I would just simply say CAATSA was violated by President Trump when he exercised no sanctions on the same issue that my colleague is concerned about. I happen to agree with him on the issue; I disagree with him in the process in which he is pursuing it. But that started with President Trump.

By the way, President Trump started with a surrender agreement to the Taliban. He gave them everything, got nothing in return. He let them have 5,000 prisoners, Taliban prisoners, who were returned to the Taliban—that added to the fighting force—and got none of the commitments that were necessary to deal with a negotiation or a peace deal with the Afghan Government. He got nothing at all except a total surrender and then dramatically reduced the troop levels at that time.

So there is a lot to talk about about Afghanistan, not only in the immediate context but over what has happened over the last 20 years. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee intends to do that extensive review through a series of hearings.

Let's put history exactly where it belongs—in the right context.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 64, James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education.

Charles E. Schumer, Patty Murray, Jack Reed, Jeanne Shaheen, Patrick J. Leahy, Martin Heinrich, Catherine Cortez Masto, Kirsten E. Gillibrand, Christopher Murphy, Tammy Duckworth, Christopher A. Coons, Tammy Baldwin, Chris Van Hollen, Tim Kaine, Thomas R. Carper, Amy Klobuchar, Margaret Wood Hassan, Alex Padilla.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of James Richard Kvaal, of Massachusetts, to be Under Secretary of Education, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rules.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from Nevada (Ms. CORTEZ MASTO), the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA), and the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. SCHATZ) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BRAUN), the Senator from Texas (Mr. CORNYN), the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 37, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 359 Leg.]

YEAS—55

Baldwin	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Romney
Blumenthal	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blunt	Hirono	Sanders
Brown	Kaine	Schumer
Burr	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Capito	Klobuchar	Sinema
Cardin	Leahy	Smith
Carper	Lujan	Stabenow
Casey	Manchin	Tester
Cassidy	Markey	Van Hollen
Collins	Marshall	Warner
Coons	Menendez	Warnock
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Ossoff	
Graham	Peters	

NAYS—37

Barrasso	Hoeven	Rubio
Blackburn	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Boozman	Inhofe	Scott (FL)
Cotton	Johnson	Shelby
Cramer	Kennedy	Sullivan
Crapo	Lankford	Thune
Cruz	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Lummis	Toomey
Ernst	McConnell	Tuberville
Fischer	Moran	Wicker
Grassley	Paul	Young
Hagerty	Portman	
Hawley	Risch	

NOT VOTING—8

Booker	Cortez Masto	Rounds
Braun	Murkowski	Schatz
Cornyn	Padilla	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KELLY). The yeas are 55, the nays are 37.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Ohio.

STOCK BUYBACKS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, a week ago today, we celebrated Labor Day, a day to honor America's workers, a day to honor the labor movement that built this country and built our middle class. It recognizes all Americans working hard every day to support families who contribute to community and power our economy.

Over the summer, as I know that the Presiding Officer has traveled to Arizona, I have been all over my State of Ohio talking with those workers: steel-

workers in Toledo, busdrivers in Canton, VA healthcare workers serving our veterans in Chillicothe, union mechanics in Columbus. They live in different communities. They come from different backgrounds. But the dignity of work unites all of us.

We take pride in hard work in this country, and we believe, as Dr. King said and Pope Leo XIII said, that all work has dignity, whether you punch a clock or swipe a badge, whether you work for tips, whether you take care of aging parents, whether you are raising children or whether you are a new grandparent—no matter who you are, where you live, or what kind of work you do.

For far too many people, hard work isn't paying off. Productivity has gone up. Stock prices have soared. Executive compensation is stratospheric. But wages have barely budged. This isn't a coincidence. It is not an accident of the market. It is not an inevitable result of our system of capitalism.

Wall Street has the power in this economy. They are obsessed with accumulating more wealth for the people who already have it. The system we have, where most of the gains in the economy seem to go to those at the top, is by Wall Street's explicit design, and it comes at the direct expense of American workers.

We don't always make the connection. People are rightfully angry, but they don't think about how decisions in corporate boardrooms and on the floors of stock exchanges thousands of miles away affect their job opportunities and their wages.

Corporations focus on their short-term performance on the stock market, not the long-term success of the company and its workers. Their main goal too often becomes increasing stock prices quarter to quarter. That is how CEO performance is evaluated. They are compensated in large part with company shares. Stocks can account for as much as half of an executive's compensation package.

Corporations, therefore, juice those stock prices by repurchasing their own stock, what we call stock buybacks. Here is how it works. There are a finite number of company shares at any given time. Purchasing shares will decrease the number of shares available to investors and therefore drive up the price and the value of the remaining shares.

Existing shareholders will see their stock value increase. Lo and behold, often those existing shareholders are the executives of the company. This is often an even more attractive option to executives than dividends because buybacks are more flexible and, under current law, they aren't taxed until the shares are sold. That is what we want to change.

The economy hasn't always worked this way. A few decades ago, most of Wall Street capital funded the real economy: wages, machinery, research, new construction, expansion of the